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ABSTRACT

This document consists of a discussion of the place and nature of evaluation within the autonomous learning scheme developed by the Centre de Recherches et d'Applications Pedagogiques en Langues (C.R.A.P.E.L.). The center's commitment to the development of an autonomous learning scheme dates back several years. It is the outcome of an attempt to create learning conditions that put learners at the center of the total learning process, for which they are responsible. This attempt is the result of a deliberate choice for a true learning approach, rather than the more commonly adopted teaching approaches, which can be either teacher- or learner-centered. The objectives of the autonomous learning scheme are to enable learners to: (1) assume responsibility for defining learning objectives, developing appropriate learning materials and techniques, and evaluating what has been learned, i.e., to develop learning competence; and (2) acquire the knowledge and know-how they need in order to become users of that language, i.e., to develop communicative competence. The discussion of evaluation within the autonomous learning scheme incorporates these two objectives, while focusing on three questions: (1) What are the functions of evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme? (2) What is the nature of evaluation in this scheme? (3) How is evaluation achieved? (CLK)

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EVALUATION IN AN AUTONOMOUS LEARNING SCHEME

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RESUME

Dans un système pédagogique centré sur l'apprentissage tel que celui du C.R.A.P.E.L., l'évaluation constitue une partie intégrante du processus d'apprentissage. Elle est entièrement prise en charge par l'apprenant dont la tâche consiste alors à évaluer, à partir de critères personnels, ses performances en tant qu'apprenant de la langue et en tant qu'utilisateur de la langue.

C'est une réflexion sur la nature et les fonctions de l'évaluation dans le système d'apprentissage du C.R.A.P.E.L., ainsi qu'une description de la manière dont elle est concrètement réalisée, qui sont proposées dans cet article. Un certain nombre de précisions sont apportées concernant :

— les fonctions spécifiques d'une évaluation interne, par rapport à une évaluation externe,
— les critères d'évaluation qui peuvent être retenus par les apprenants,
— les techniques d'évaluation qui peuvent être utilisées par les apprenants.

The CRAPEL's commitment to the development of an autonomous learning scheme dates back several years [1]. The set up, as it is presently operating, is the outcome of an attempt to create learning conditions that put learners in their place — that is, at the center of the total learning process, for which they are responsible. This attempt is the result of a deliberate choice for a true learning approach, rather than the more commonly adopted teaching approaches (which can be either teacher or learner-centered) [2]. The latter emphasize teaching methods, teaching objectives, and teachers, whereas the former concentrates on the individual learners and how they handle the learning process in order to achieve self-established goals.

All components of the autonomous learning scheme (objective, role of participants, content, strategies, etc...) have been developed in accordance with the implications of such an approach. A full discussion of all these definitions would be irrelevant to the problem of evaluation dealt with in this paper ; however, something needs to be said about the objective of the scheme, since evaluation and objective are indissociable concepts.

The objective of our scheme is necessarily twofold :

a) to enable learners to assume responsability for defining learning objectives, developing appropriate learning materials and techniques, and evaluating what has been learned, that is, to develop *learning competence* ;

b) and to enable learners to acquire the knowledge and know-how they need in order to become users of that language, that is to develop *communicative competence*.

Our discussion of evaluation within the autonomous learning scheme will incorporate these two dimensions, while focussing on the following three questions :

1 — What are the functions of evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme ?

2 — What is the nature of evaluation in this scheme ?

3 — How is evaluation achieved in the autonomous learning scheme ?

[1] For an explanation of autonomy as a process, and a detailed description of this scheme, see ABE, HENNER-STANCHINA, SMITH (1975).

[2] Learner-centered teaching approaches would be, for example, programmed learning, the Open University, and other systems where the learner does not have control over the various stages of learning.

1. Functions of evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme :

1.1. In the autonomous learning scheme, evaluation constitutes an integral part of the learning process, on a par with the definition of objectives, of content, etc... This means that it is not a final, extra feature of the scheme, external to the learning process, whose only purpose is to provide quantitative assessment of the learning that has been done, for the benefit of the teaching institution or any other body in the broader social environment where learning takes place. It is, on the contrary, an internal part of the learning process without which no learning can be achieved.

If learning is analyzed as a series of successive learning acts, and these in turn are broken down into the five steps below which were defined by Dieuzeide (1971), then it is clear that evaluation is indeed one of the constituent steps of the learning act :

i — an information step : the seeking and gathering of data to be learned,

ii — an exploitation step : the organization and elaboration of gathered data,

iii — an assimilation step,

iv — a transfer step : the application of the knowledge acquired,

v — a control step.

Its overall function is :

— within each act, to provide feedback information (on assimilation and transfer) necessary for the satisfactory completion of the act,

— at the end of each act, to provide input information for steps i and ii (information and exploitation) of the following act.

1.2. More specifically, from the learner's standpoint, evaluation serves the double purpose of :

a) assessing performance as a language learner (assessment of learning competence)

b) assessing performance as a language user (assessment of communicative competence).

a) As a language learner one needs feedback and input information on learning strategies, learning techniques, etc..., in other words, on the suitability and effectiveness of learning in relation to personal learning criteria and per-

sonal goals. This information will increase the learner's awareness of how he learns and help him make decisions as to the continuation or modification of his learning activities.

b) As a language user, one needs feedback and input information on what is being learned, not only in terms of the nature of the acquisition (language - vocabulary, grammar, etc ; communicative functions, cultural dimension, etc.) but also in terms of the adequacy of this acquisition in relation to personal communicative and cultural needs [3].

2. Nature of evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme :

2.1. As an integral part of the learning process, evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme is not of a comparative nature. It is not norm-referenced, or based on a comparison between personal achievement and externally defined norms, whether these norms are defined in terms of the subject-matter, or with reference to a syllabus. Neither is it other-referenced, or based on a comparison between personal achievement and other learners' levels of achievement.

It is rather a form of self-assessment in which the learners simultaneously create and undergo the evaluation procedure, judging their achievement in relation to themselves, against their own personal criteria, in accordance with their own objectives and learning expectations.

This type of evaluation is consequently characterized by variations in aspects such as content, threshold, form and timing, all of which must be redefined for and by each learner.

2.2. Evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme is of a different nature depending on whether it applies to performance as a language learner or as a language user.

a) As has already been mentioned, evaluation of language learner performance is evaluation by the learners of the suitability and effectiveness of

[3] This analytical and essential distinction between assessment of performance both as a language learner and as a language user does not imply that there is no relationship between the two. In fact, evaluation of communicative competence will always be a basis for evaluation of learning effectiveness in that learning, as a means to an end, cannot be evaluated independently from that desired end.

the learning strategies and techniques they have developed [4]. The criteria for judging these are highly personal (as personal as the definitions of the notions of " suitability " and " effectiveness " themselves), so that a particular learner may choose to take any one of the following criteria (and this list is by no means exhaustive) into account when judging the suitability of learning strategies and techniques :

i *Compatibility between learning strategies and techniques and personal constraints,* such as time and space availability (certain strategies and techniques might be too time-consuming, or impose a study schedule incompatible with professional obligations) ; material possibilities (relation between technical facilities available and technical facilities required, cost-effectiveness of strategies chosen) ; or intellectual capacities (relation between personal memory capacity and demand made on memory by a particular technique, for example) ; or physical capacities, etc... ;

ii *Correspondence between learning strategies and techniques and personal expectations,* such as the reward derived from learning activities (in terms of pleasure, ego-satisfaction, status, etc...) ;

iii *Correspondence between learning strategies and techniques and personal optimal rate of learning ;*

iv *Correspondence between learning strategies and techniques and work load tolerance ;*

v *Relation between learning strategies and techniques and optimal degree of difficulty tolerated* (some learners will prefer the challenging tasks set by some techniques, others will not, etc...).

In the case, for example, of a learner who has chosen transcribing as a technique geared to improve his listening comprehension skill, that learner will determine the suitability of this technique by deciding :

i - whether transcribing slows him down too much, taking up too much of the limited time he can devote to learning, and making for a frustratingly slow rate of learning ;

[4] In a teaching-centered approach, especially in some learner-centered teaching schemes, there is, to some extent, evaluation of the suitability of strategies and techniques, but this is done by the teacher on the basis of majority rule within a group of learners — in the best cases, and on the sole basis of the teacher's specifications — in the worst.

ii - to what extent transcribing is compatible with the physical setting in which he does his learning : if, for professional reasons, he spends a great deal of time driving, and this is the only possible time he can set aside for learning, then obviously transcribing is neither realistic nor suitable as a solution ;

iii - whether the work involved in transcribing (stopping, rewinding, replaying, etc.) is pleasant, acceptable or unbearable to him ;

iv - whether it involves him in a task too difficult for his level of learning.

b) As for evaluation of learning effectiveness, this, as previously stated, is based on an assessment of the nature and adequacy of what is being learned, or on performance as a language user. Here again, the evaluation criteria will be individually determined and will correspond to a personal definition of successful performance, both in terms of the elements constituting successful performance and the achievement level aspired to. Some elements of performance that might be considered essential by a particular learner (thereby having a direct impact on the learning process) are :

i - (traditional) phonetic, grammatical correctness
ii - lexical richness and/or precision
iii - stylistic variability (allowing for adaptation of performance to momentary mood, temper, degree of formality, etc...)
iv - fluency
v - intelligibility
vi - communicative efficacy of combined verbal and non-verbal behaviors
vii - individuality of performance (in relation to learner's personality traits : getting humor across, etc...)
viii - existence and operation of compensation strategies [5], etc...

One or any combination of these and other aspects will be selected by a learner as important components of performance [6]. Having selected from among these elements, learners will then apply their personal criteria of satisfactory

[5] How to compensate verbally and non-verbally for the fact that one is not a native user of the language.

[6] A different aspect, or aspects, may be retained at different stages of the learning process. The criterion " being oneself while communicating " can obviously only be applied after a certain amount of learning has taken place.

achievement level, the scale ranging from simply getting along in the language to perfection. For example, a learner might value being himself when communicating in the foreign language, thus relegating phonetic/grammatical correctness to a lower position, while stressing the importance of individuality and stylistic variability in his performance.

His subjective satisfactory level of achievement would then be defined in terms of sufficient/insufficient individuality and variability [7].

Evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme is, then, entirely different from traditional external evaluation. As the description provided here reveals, it does not lend itself to any form of standardization. No formal test could possibly take all the criteria described into account (if only because any attempt to define them precisely would itself pose insuperable problems), nor allow for the variable achievement levels involved. This raises a number of questions (some of them will be dealt with in the conclusion of this paper), among which the most immediately relevant to the preoccupations of any language teacher (" helper " in the autonomous learning scheme) is : " how can such evaluation be achieved ? "

3. Realization of evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme :

3.1. As a preliminary consideration, attention must be drawn to the fact that learning how to learn is a gradual process and not a pre-requisite for participation in an autonomous learning scheme. The learners engaged in this scheme are, thus, still in the process of learning how to learn, so that they are in fact confronted simultaneously with the task of learning how to carry out evaluation of their performance as language learners and language users, and the task of actually evaluating this performance. These two tasks are very closely associated in the learning process.

Since the nature of evaluation in the autonomous learning scheme is such that learners are encouraged to assess their performance with their own personal tools (personal criteria and personal expectations as to desired level of achie-

[7] Subjectivity plays an important role in this type of evaluation. Although ways may be found of " guiding " or " enlightening " this subjectivity, it will never lend itself to any degree of measured control. This is subjectively regarded as perfectly legitimate in a learning-centered approach !

vement), it follows that learners must be aware of their personal categories. Another aspect, then, of the self-assessment task is to discover and define those categories one will want to use in evaluating performance [8].

3.2. Basically, evaluation requires that there should be performances to assess. Moreover, and this cannot be overemphasized, these performances should be as authentic as possible, to ensure that what will be assessed will be genuine learning and communicative behaviour, reflecting genuine learner competence [9]. These performances are then analyzed *by the learners* in terms of their individually defined categories.

In the autonomous learning scheme, these two operations are carried out as follows :

a) for the assessment of language learning, no special performance need be elicited from the learners, for it is simply their day by day behavior that will constitute the performance to be analyzed.

Learners may assess the suitability of the learning strategies and techniques they have developed whenever they feel the need to do so ; thus, at variable intervals, alone, or during a helper-learner session, with the helper assisting as listener (making it easier for learners to objectify their situations) and as counsellor (passing on information gathered from other learners or from experience with language learning). Learners may also request peer-matching sessions, during which they can discuss their learning problems with other learners.

This assessment- along with that of learning effectiveness, which can be inferred from the evaluation of what has been learned (if communicative competence has been acquired, then the strategies and techniques are deemed effective) — serves as a basis for further decisions regarding the continuing learning procedure.

[8] This will usually conflict with the learners' previous experience with evaluation which instilled the notion of externally-referenced norms, and consequently, may be a relatively slow process. Once the categories are defined, however, learners are in a much better position to define their intermediate and final learning objectives.

[9] One of the major drawbacks of external evaluation based on standardized tests is that for various reasons (test design constraints among them), the performance generally elicited from the learner is artificial and its validity in relation to the learners' competence cannot be easily ascertained.

b) In order to evaluate the actual results of learning, that is, the acquisition of communicative competence, learners will need to be placed in authentic communication situations in which their competence at that particular point will be revealed. This can be done through :

I - *direct contact with authentic materials* : video or sound recordings if the learners want to check their listening comprehension ; written texts-samples of the texts they have to be able to use in real life, for checking reading comprehension ;

II - *direct contact with native speakers* : which learners initiate and organize as to time, location, type of exchange, depending on the aspects of performance they wish to test. These contacts might range, for example, from a short session with a native speaker acting as listener merely to test the intelligibility of the learner's reading aloud of a paper to be presented at a conference, to a longer session of informal conversation over dinner, etc... ;

III - *simulations* : reproducing as closely as possible the real life communication situation for which learners are preparing : for example, a spontaneous oral commentary of a technical slide presentation before a non-French-speaking audience.

Learners analyze these performances, on the recordings if any have been made, or from memory, in terms of the categories they have selected for each particular performance (they are advised not to check too many categories at a time), and may write out statements about the quality of the results obtained [10].

It must be emphasized again that no evaluation of this type can be undertaken by the learners until they have defined the analytic tools. Obviously, some of the criteria we described will be discovered and understood immediately (eg. grammatical correctness, or correspondence between learning strategies and techniques and personal constraints) ; others will demand more time to be internalized and become operational, and entail more than just a modicum of reflexion on communication in the mother-tongue (eg : stylistic variability, or compensation strategies), for they are not part of the individual's learning experience.

[10] These statements would be of a descriptive type, very much like these contained in Mats Oskarsson's forms for self-assessment of language functions and exponents (M. Oskarsson, 1977, p. A 16 and fol).

Conclusions

Having provided a description of the internal type of evaluation that is characteristic of our autonomous-learning scheme, we hope that it will in turn shed light on the very nature of the strategy itself and on the fundamental differences between our approach to learning and the various approaches to teaching being developed elsewhere.

Any scheme in which evaluation remains externally-referenced (whether it be in the form of self-administered normal tests, or other forms which, in any case, are not in the hands of the learners), cannot claim to be a true learning scheme.

The internal type of evaluation proposed here raises a number of problems that still have not been stated clearly, let alone resolved. These range from simply spreading information about this alternative to traditional testing to potential learners, teachers, employers, and all other parties concerned with language learning, to actually implementing this type of evaluation in different contexts.

On the pedagogical scene, the more progressive circles of educational planning [11] are presently focussing their attention on the possible choice between external and internal evaluation, and on the relationship that could eventually hold between these two types of evaluation. Proponents of external evaluation through formal testing argue that this type of assessment is indispensable, as it is the only way to satisfy the societal need for certification. To this, proponents of internal evaluation through individual assessment reply that, as far as adult education is concerned, this need for certification has been grossly overestimated, since " many if not most adults who participate in courses do so because they want to satisfy their desire to learn something, not because they need, or attach great value to, a certain formal attestation of their performance " [12].

An additional argument in favor of internal evaluation might also be that professional selection, among others, is still very largely conditioned by the status quo in the field ; if sufficient information were given to selection bodies

[11] For a very good description of this situation, and a clear statement of the arguments involved, see Mats Oskarsson, 1977.

[12] Cf. Mats Oskarsson, 1977, p. 3.

on progress made in communication analysis, needs analysis and evaluation techniques, they might very well discover that the information obtained from formal tests is insufficient, if not altogether irrelevant for their purposes [13].

On the other hand, if both types of evaluation are maintained, the problem of possible contradictions will have to be examined : what, for instance, would the psychological reaction of a learner be if his own evaluation turned out to be radically different from the formal external evaluation ? Further experimental research is certainly necessary here. Would a reasonable temporary decision be to restrict external evaluation to those cases where certification is necessary ?..

In the autonomous learning scheme, internal evaluation is one of the fundamental pedagogical requisites. Further research is presently under way, aiming at a better knowledge of the different criteria used intuitively by learners to describe their performance (this will also reveal some of the learners' representations of learning/knowing a language), and at the discovery of more varied performance elicitation techniques.

[13] They would, for instance, discover that among the criteria used for judging the competence of, say, a would-be PR-man, the non standardizable criterion of " being oneself in communication " occupies a prominent plan linked to the importance of context qualities in the specification of such a job. All this militates strongly in favor of further research into job communication specification.

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